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ABSTRACT

Opportunities for and limits upon diary writing in one second/third-grade classroom are examined with the purpose of stimulating critical thinking about two issues: (1) the diary's potential within the school writing curriculum, and (2) the classroom as an environment for the teaching and learning of writing. Field notes, teacher journal entries, and student diary entries demonstrate how diary time was started, modified, and sustained. The activity is analyzed in terms of teacher planning, implementation, audience, and the function of diary writing for young children. Conflicting messages regarding issues of privacy, correctness, and audience illustrate the complexity of carrying out this kind of writing occasion in an elementary school classroom and account for the eventual deletion of diary time from the schedule of classroom activities. (Author/RH)

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# DIARY TIME: THE LIFE HISTORY OF AN OCCASION FOR WRITING

Christopher M. Clark and Susan Florio

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## Abstract

The genesis and development of diary time, an occasion for writing in a combined second/third-grade classroom is described. Field notes, teacher journal entries, and student diary entries demonstrate how diary time was started, modified, and sustained. The activity is analyzed in terms of teacher planning, implementation, audience, and the function of diary writing for young children. Conflicting messages regarding issues of privacy, correctness, and audience illustrate the complexity of carrying out this kind of writing occasion in an elementary school classroom and account for the demise of diary time.

# DIARY TIME: THE LIFE HISTORY OF AN OCCASION FOR WRITING[1]

Christopher M. Clark and Susan Florio[2,3]

## Introduction

Student diaries--perhaps you have thought about them or tried them in your classroom. There are many reasons to encourage the keeping of diaries by students. Diaries provide opportunities to reflect on past experience and to formulate that reflection in writing. In diaries, writing can be practiced in privacy, without concern for an audience's scrutiny. Yet when student diaries are shared, they afford teachers a window on the thoughts and feelings of their young authors. So why not plan a classroom diary time?

If this sounds too simple to you, you are not alone. Years ago, psychologist Gordon Allport attempted to use the diary as a way to understand the inner lives of his subjects. He found that, although it was a powerful written form, the diary was not a simple one.

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[1]A version of this paper was presented at a Pre-Conference Session at the 32nd Annual Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics titled, "Writing in the Classroom: Qualitative Studies." Washington, D.C., March 19, 1981.

[2]The major authors of this paper are named in alphabetical order. As co-principal investigators in the study reported here, they have contributed equally. This study is funded by the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education (Grant No. 90840).

[3]Susan Florio and Christopher M. Clark are co-coordinators of the Written Literacy Study. Florio is an MSU associate professor in the Department of Student Teaching and Professional Development, and Clark is an MSU associate professor of teacher education and educational psychology.

Allport (1942) noted, for example, that despite the apparent privacy and revelatory potential of this written form, the "picture of the theoretical perfection of the diary . . . is often not realized in practice" (pp. 95-96). The realities of the writing situation place limits on the diarist. This is in large part because diary writing, like all writing, is both a social and a personal activity.

If one imagines the ideal diarist working at will and in blessed isolation, issues of social context appear not to be a problem. Yet few diarists work in this fashion. Many diarists intend that their writing will someday be read by an audience other than themselves[4] or use their diaries to record and reflect upon their social relations.[5] When diaries are attempted within institutional settings such as the classroom, their "theoretical perfection" is clouded still further by the realities of school life. Most obviously, diaries written in school are not written in privacy. They are often initiated, not by the diarist, but by the teacher. And since most writing done in school has an audience, the issue of audience in classroom diaries is, at best, uncertain.

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[4]An example is the diary of the late Bostonian, Arthur Crew Inman. Compiled between the years 1919 and 1963, Inman's diary presents his view on life and politics and contains more than ten million words. The diary is currently being edited for publication by Harvard professor of literature, Daniel Aaron. It is reported that in this enterprise Aaron has been helped by the fact that

> the diary itself contains detailed instructions to the future editor, dictating how the manuscript was to be treated, from questions of style to punctuation. Inman's strictest editorial fiat was that nothing shocking be removed on account of squeamishness. (Colt, 1981, p. 50)

[5]Diary writing can be used to deal constructively with personal problems. Among the diary writing techniques recommended in this regard are some potentially social ones including the writing of dialogues and "unsent letters" (Rainer, 1978). In addition, such techniques have been adapted for classroom use. In the "dialogue journal," the student makes regular diary entries that are responded to in writing by the teacher. In the course of these written dialogues, thoughts and feelings are explored interactively, and there is opportunity for development of written language skills (Staton, Note 1; Shuy, Note 2).

This report examines the social complexities of diary writing in one second/third-grade classroom. It does so in the form of a life history of diary time as an occasion for writing. As such, the report does not offer a recipe for how to keep classroom diaries. Instead it portrays the opportunities for and limits upon diary writing in the classroom. This portrayal is intended to stimulate the reader's critical thinking about two issues--the diary's potential within the school writing curriculum and, perhaps more importantly, the classroom as an environment for the teaching and learning of writing.

The report is based on a year-long descriptive study of writing and its instruction in an elementary classroom in a mid-Michigan suburb. Sources of data used in the preparation of the report include fieldnotes from classroom participant observation, weekly journals kept by the teacher detailing her thoughts on instruction in general and writing instruction in particular, weekly interviews with the teacher, and naturally occurring student writings. The study combined methods and theoretical perspectives from cognitive psychology, ethnography, and sociolinguistics.[6]

## The Life History of Diary Time

Our first regular interview with Ms. Donovan,[7] the second/third-grade teacher in Room 12, took place on September 5, the day before

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[6]For details of the study on which this report is based, see Clark and Florio (Note 3) and Florio and Clark (in press).

[7]Pseudonyms are used throughout this report to protect the privacy of teacher and children.

the school year began. She told us that this year she planned to have her students write in diaries for the last 10 or 15 minutes of each school day, and that she planned to use that time herself to write in the journal that she was keeping as part of the research project. She said she expected to write in a "stream-of-consciousness" fashion. Field notes written on the same day indicate that as Ms. Donovan drafted a model daily schedule, she allotted the final 10 minutes of the day to diary time. Ms. Donovan commented to the field-worker that having her students write in diaries was something she had wanted to do for a long time and that her participation in the research project would "give added impetus" to do it (Field Notes, 9/5/79).

Getting Started

On the first day of school, diary time was expanded to the final full hour of the day, to allow time for Ms. Donovan to orient the students (i.e., communicate her plan for diary time) and for the students to make and decorate cardboard covers for their diaries as well as to write their first diary entries. Following afternoon recess, at about 2:15 p.m., Ms. Donovan had the children sit on the carpet in a filled circle (a configuration used for class meetings and for receiving instruction and directions from the teacher). The field notes (9/6/79) pick up the story:

> Looking up at the chalkboard where the schedule had been written, one child said, "It's almost time for diary." Another child said, "What's that?" Ms. Donovan said, "That's what we have to discuss. Some kids don't know what it is yet."
>
> Proceeding, Ms. Donovan asked, "Does anyone know what a diary is?"
>
> Linda: "Things that you write down that you think of."
>
> Kathy: "private"
>
> Sarah: "that you think are important"

After taking some comments from the floor, Ms. Donovan noted that "no two diaries are the same." Anthony chimed in at this point: "I already have a diary with a key and lock." There was a discussion about why one might lock a diary. The issue of privacy was highlighted, and Ms. Donovan said, "I don't want to read them unless you want to share them with me or the class." She offered to lock them in a filing cabinet drawer.

Dani asked, "How do you correct them?"

Ms. Donovan said that they were not to be corrected and that she, too, would have one.

Considerable time was spent constructing the diaries, and the procedure had the following parts:

1. The diary covers were to be decorated with crayon or magic marker.

2. Children who finished decorating ahead of time were not to begin writing in the diaries but were to take a worksheet and complete it. The worksheets were mazes and the children were told they could color them. They were told the mazes would be "corrected."

3. Children were to decorate their diaries with picture(s) of favorite things. Then the diaries were filled with five sheets of lined paper.

4. The third-grade paper was distinguished from the second-grade paper (they are essentially the same except that third-grade paper has narrower spaces between the lines). Ms. Donovan asked the field-worker to help distribute paper, and she found the distinction by grade disconcerting. It was noted by the children, but not accompanied with an explanation, and each time the fieldworker/helper gave someone paper she had to ask them their grade--somewhat of a non-sequitur to some of the children.

5. When the children asked what would happen when they finished using the five pages, they were told that they could "make a new one."

Ms. Donovan gave an example of the cover illustration for the diary. She drew a Christmas tree. Three children (Mary, Stefan, and Kris) drew Christmas trees, too. Other covers included the following: bicycles, a star that evolved into the emblem of the Dallas cowboys, a house, a cat, a swing set, and a tree.

Once the covers were underway, Ms. Donovan passed out the "third-grade paper" and asked the researcher/helper to pass out the "second-grade paper." Then the children began to write in their diaries as Ms. Donovan circulated, stapling the booklets together. There were several procedural directives as the writing began.

1. With regard to privacy, Ms. Donovan said that you shouldn't ask other people what they are writing.

2. Regarding help with spelling words, Ms. Donovan said that she would also be writing in her diary and not looking up and around the room. Therefore, students should come up to her table if they need help. Ms. Donovan said that the researcher/helper would available to help as well. The researcher decided to write in her field-note journal during diary-writing time. Much like during Uninterrupted Silent Reading (USR), Ms. Donovan and the fieldworker both modeled the process and, perhaps enabled it by this strategy.

3. Ms. Donovan said that she would share part of what she was writing in her diary (i.e., that she has a good class and has had a good day). The rest, she said, "is for me." She also pointed out that diary time "was sort of like USR, but was UW (Uninterrupted Writing), so that you can think and write down your thoughts by yourself." She added that "if you can't think of anything, write the word 'write' until you can think of an idea."

During UW, some children came to the fieldworker with scraps of paper and asked her to spell words for them. The first was Stan. He had a full sheet of third-grade paper and said that he would keep the words she spelled for him in a list so that he could remember them. He said that he did this last year with his second-grade teacher. Some of the children came with questions about what to write (e.g., Do you write about "just school," or can you write about "before school?").

During the diary writing time, there was not much talk among the students. For the first time, the fieldworker saw some children put up tall books and workbooks around their papers as barriers. There appeared to be much concern for privacy, and the students did not hasten to show their entries to Ms. Donovan or her. Writing went on this way from 2:50 until 3:00.

At 3:01, Ms. Donovan asked the children to stop. She asked, "How many people had a hard time thinking of things to write about?" She suggested that anybody who didn't should give them some ideas. (She was apparently aware of Chet, the boy who had the most trouble thinking of something to write. He had come to the fieldworker for help in decorating his cover. When she suggested that he might want to write some-

thing inside, he said he did not know what to write. Attempting to get him started, she discovered that he is new in town, has yet to make many friends, and therefore felt he did not have much to recount. Ms. Donovan addressed much of the post-writing discussion to Chet, looking at him a lot.) Ms. Donovan asked the class, "How did you think of things to write?" She called on two boys who seemed to have no trouble making entries.

Joseph: "I thought."
Anthony: "I don't know."

Ms. Donovan said, "It isn't easy to talk about. I had a hard time also." But she suggested topics such as "what you liked about today," "what you didn't like about today," and "how you felt."

"How do you feel right now--at the end of the day?" The students said that they were "tired," that they "wanted to stay some more." Saying that they could write about these feelings and that she didn't want to "cut them off," Ms. Donovan promised that there would be more time tomorrow. She let those that wanted to continue writing do so for a few minutes but began to collect the diaries and put them in her file cabinet.

Diary writing was followed by a very brief clean up and dismissal (Field Notes, 9/6/79).

Discussion

Diary time was clearly a planned occasion for writing that originated with the teacher. By allocating a regular daily slot for diary writing even before she met her students and by discussing her intentions with the researchers, Ms. Donovan made a commitment to establish this activity as a routine. On September 5, we had no detailed evidence of her plan or mental picture of what diary time would be like, or of what purposes she thought it might serve for her students. But Ms. Donovan's scheduling of diary time as the very last activity of the day and her expressed desire to write in her own journal at that time suggest a picture of a quiet period of private reflection on and writing about the major events of the day, during which each child would be in his or her own little world for a while. But the realities of the classroom

transformed this idyllic picture in many unforeseen ways. There are a number of interesting features about the first diary time. We address them under the headings of planning, implementation, audience, and function.

Planning. As mentioned above, diary time was clearly a teacher-originated and teacher-planned activity (as distinguished from student-initiated activities, mandated curricular activities, or unexpected, serendipitous events). Ms. Donovan told us of her intention to have the students write daily diary entries on the day before school began. She allocated a full hour of the important first day of school to diary time, and built in a 10-minute time slot at the end of each daily schedule for diary writing. Her comments on the day before school began, and her actions during the first diary time indicate that she had wanted to have students keep diaries for some years, that she had never done so before, that her participation in a study of written literacy (including her own keeping of a journal) provided added impetus to institute diary time, and that she was convinced that diary time would be a valuable activity for her students. In short, it was important to Ms. Donovan that diary time succeed.

Much of Ms. Donovan's planning for diary time must be inferred from indirect evidence. Like other experienced elementary teachers whose planning has been studied (Clark & Yinger, 1979), she did not write out an elaborate, step-by-step plan-book entry for diary time. The only visible record of planning for the first diary time is the written schedule for that day. Yet her comments recorded in the September 5 interview and field notes, her relatively elaborate communication of the diary-time plan to the students, and the fact that materials for making the diary covers were ready when needed all indicate that Ms.

Donovan had an elaborate plan worked out in her mind--she was not simply playing it by ear. Although her planning was a necessary preparation for diary time, it was invisible to outside observers.

Implementation. It is usually the case in the unpredictable world of the elementary school classroom that activities are not implemented exactly as planned. This discrepancy between plan and action is especially likely to be visible in the early days and weeks of school, when teacher and students are first getting to know one another, and also in the case of activities that a teacher is implementing for the first time. The first diary time met both of these conditions, and Ms. Donovan adjusted her plan to accomodate the unpredictable. In the orienting discussion of what diaries are, she built on student contributions of ideas about the purposes and contents of diary entries. The discussion of the privacy issue was triggered by a student reporting that he owned a diary with a lock and key. Ms. Donovan incorporated as an aide in this activity the fieldworker, who handed out paper and helped the children spell words. Implementation of Ms. Donovan's advance plan depended very much on her interactive decision making and flexibility in building on student contributions. The plan was tailored to fit the moment rather than the moment forced to fit the structure of the plan.

Another feature of plan implementation worth mentioning is Ms. Donovan's use of modeling. She modeled both the decoration of a diary cover and the diary writing process itself. Further, she shared one part of her own diary entry with the class, but told them that the remainder of the entry was private ("just for me"), showing that each writer was to be the judge of what to share and what to keep secret.

Ms. Donovan's use of modeling shows up in various ways in other occasions for writing throughout the year. The first diary time is the earliest example of a pattern of modeling in which the emphasis is on making explicit how the teacher is thinking about and doing the writing task herself rather than telling the students what the "right way" to do the task is. Implicit in this approach to modeling a task are the teacher's concern that students learn and attend to the processes (of thought and action) as well as to the products (a diary cover or entry), sufficient respect for the importance and meaningfulness of the task that the teacher herself will enter into it as a full participant, and an openness to accept decisions by individual students to approach the task in a way that is different from that modeled by the teacher (as long as they do participate).

Another element of diary-time implementation worth comment is that the activity combined construction, art work, oral discussion, and writing. Every student was able to make and decorate a personalized diary cover, and to participate as a listener or speaker in the discussion of what diaries are and how they can be useful. Even those children who did not write anything in their diaries had a concrete, visible product to show for the first day of school. Furthermore, the cover decorations were to be "pictures of favorite things"--a way for students to reflect on, declare, and make public (to the teacher and to classmates) some personal information. A measure of success for all students was built into the activity, and the link between drawing and writing was manifested on the first day of school.

Finally, it is clear that implementation of the first diary time was also the beginning of Ms. Donovan's planning for the second and

subsequent diary times. She paid attention to the unanticipated problems in implementation that cropped up, and immediately began thinking of ways to solve these problems. After the children were dismissed at the end of the first day of school, Ms. Donovan wrote a journal entry of her own that was both a reflection on diary time and a plan for improving the process on the following day. In her reflection and planning, Ms. Donovan identified two problems encountered in the first diary time (children interrupting her to ask how to spell words that they wanted to write, and some children who couldn't think of anything to write) and came up with the idea to help solve the second of these problems:

> Discussed writing a diary; emphasized idea of personal thoughts and importance of privacy. Most caught on quickly ...some kept their own diaries at home.
>
> I had planned to keep my journal while the class works in theirs, but for the first few weeks it will be difficult to accomplish with their interruptions for spelling and ideas.
>
> Tomorrow I'll read short selections from logs and journals kept by such people as Anne Frank and Washington Irving and have the children figure out how they have become useful for us and possibly give them some ideas. I'll have some share their entries from yesterday if they wish, then pull a small group to work out some strategies to help them think of what to write. (Journal, 9/6/79)

Especially in a continuing activity like diary time, the teacher played the roles of observant and reflective critic of her own teaching, problem solver and formative evaluator of classroom processes, as well as leader, instructor, and facilitator of those activities.

Audience. Who was the audience for the student diary entries? At one level the teacher intended that the young diarist himself or herself would be the primary audience. The discussion of privacy

reflected in the field notes quoted above, and the seriousness with which teacher and student guarded their own privacy lend support to the hypothesis of "self as audience." But, at the same time, there is evidence to suggest that both teacher and students saw teacher and peers as a potential audience for diary entries. The facts that diary time was a teacher-imposed task, that the teacher knew and taught about "the rules" of diary keeping, that the teacher read aloud a part of her own first journal entry, and that the teacher collected and stored the diaries in her filing cabinet all supported the idea of "teacher as audience." Student concerns about accurate spelling, questions about how the teacher "will correct them" (Field Notes, 9/6/79), and teacher assistance for those who could not think of what to write consititute additional evidence of teacher as audience. Peers were introduced as a potential audience by Ms. Donovan's comment that "I don't want to read them (the diaries) unless you want to share them with me or the class" (Field Notes, 9/6/79).

According to the fieldworker, the children appeared to be a bit confused by the mixed message of privacy, on the one hand, and teacher/peers as audience on the other (Field Notes, 9/6/79). The diary-writing activity could be seen as an invitation to engage in two incompatible tasks: (1) private, freewheeling writing intended for the author's eyes only, in which description and reflection were of paramount importance, and errors of form, spelling, or grammar were of no consequence, and (2) "correct" writing about one's daily experiences and feelings, that fits the conventions of diary entries as a literary form and the conventions of neatness, spelling, punctuation, coherence, and length of

school writing tasks that please the teacher.[8] Taking the perspective of a seven- or eight-year-old child on the first day of school, one can imagine a number of ways to respond to this dilemma:

1. Treat diary time as just another school writing task, and write what you think will please the teacher. Get help from an adult with spelling words and with further clarification of "the rules."

2. Treat diary time as a private, reflective writing task in which the usual rules of school writing are mercifully suspended.

3. Write nothing. Let the teacher remove all of the ambiguity from this new kind of writing task by helping you think of what (and how) to write.

These three alternatives characterize the observed range of student responses to the first diary time. The central point of this interpretation is that ambiguity about the audience of a student writing activity can affect both the interpretation of the task and the students' performance of the writing in diverse ways.

Function. Initially, the primary function of diary time intended by Ms. Donovan was to provide her students with an opportunity to reflect on the events of the day and to become aware of their own feelings and thoughts about school life. As mentioned above, the evidence for this intended function includes Ms. Donovan's scheduling of diary time as the last activity of the school day and her expressed desire to write reflectively in her own journal while the children wrote in their diaries.

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[8]It is interesting to speculate about how this internal tension in the diary-writing occasion relates to Doyle's (1978) research on classroom task structure in which he points out that even children relatively new to school are caught up on the "performance for grade" exchange. Indeed, it is reasonable to claim that *all* school writing occasions initiated by the teacher include the teacher as one important audience.

Ms. Donovan saw her own journal writing in connection with the research project and the students' daily diary writing as potentially serving similar ends. In an early journal entry she speculates about this parallel:

> Sharing this journal and my thoughts during the week with another (the researcher) on a scheduled basis is helping me to reflect in a less nebulous manner on planning and assessment of lessons. By articulating my conceptions and beliefs, it has become easier for me to present ideas in a more logical manner with fewer inconsistencies. I wonder if the children will develop greater oral ease through writing and reflecting on their ideas? (Journal, 9/11/79)

The first diary time was an opportunity for every student to succeed at constructing and decorating a diary--a visible product of the first day of school. Furthermore, the decorations on the diary covers constituted information about each student's favorite things that was useful to the teacher, the individual young artist, and his/her peers. In this way, the first diary time contributed to the process of building a social system in the classroom--getting the year off to a good start by getting to know one another.

The investment of a full hour of the first day of school to diary time communicated to the students that writing was to be an important part of life in this classroom, and that Ms. Donovan would do whatever was necessary to insure that everyone would write. Providing the correct spelling of words and her plan to work with small groups who could not think of anything to write are examples of Ms. Donovan's determination to have every student participate, even at the expense of journal writing time for herself.

Beyond communicating teacher expectations about writing in Room 12, the first diary time also served as a diagnostic or writing assessment

opportunity for Ms. Donovan. She learned, somewhat to her surprise, which students had the most difficulty writing. She learned that all of her students were concerned about correct spelling of words, even though the teacher-intended audience for the diary was the writer. She also learned that the concept of a diary and the personal and historical functions that a diary can serve were not well understood by her students, and she formed a plan to fill this gap of knowledge and motivation. And finally, Ms. Donovan began to learn about the amount and kind of teacher energy it would take to introduce, implement, and maintain a complex and long-term occasion for writing with her particular group of students.

Finally, diary time served a managerial function: to calm down students at the end of the school day and to end the day on a reflective academically justifiable note. The comparison of diary writing to Uninterrupted Silent Reading (USR) that Ms. Donovan made when introducing the first diary time is telling (Field Notes, 9/6/79). Ms. Donovan had used USR following recess and lunch to calm children down and to focus them on an individual academic task as they returned to the classroom, one by one or two by two. Diary time (or Uninterrupted Writing) served a closure and transition function between school and home, just as USR was intended (in part) to ease the transition between active, social, out-of-classroom activity and calmer, often individual, in-class academic activity.

## The Complexity of Diary Writing in School

Diary time was an occasion for writing that did not live up to all of Ms. Donovan's hopes and expectations, yet it was one from which

the students, the teacher, and the researchers derived substantial benefit. In the year that we observed Ms. Donovan's class, diary time was undertaken for the first time. From research on teacher planning and from the reports of experienced teachers, it is apparent that teaching something for the first time can amount to a pilot test (Clark & Elmore, Note 4). The pilot test of diary time in Ms. Donovan's room, while only partially successful, yielded many insights about writing, instruction, and the classroom learning environment. In a sense, the life history of diary time is offered as an opportunity for the reader to experience that pilot test vicariously and think about its implications for his/her own teaching.

For all of the instructional soundness of diary time, the seeds of its ultimate difficulties were present from the outset. Despite teacher planning and support, diary time, like many classroom activities, took on a life of its own as the year progressed. By year's end, about six children were still keeping diaries in school, but they were doing so as independent activity during their free time. The field notes show that, not far into October, the regular 10-minute slot intended for diary time was at first shifted to various parts of the day. By January it had been removed entirely from the daily calendar.

What were the difficulties in sustaining a daily diary time? Ms. Donovan had some ideas on the subject when she was interviewed almost a full year later:

> Originally I had hoped to write a diary at the same time the children did, but it didn't work out too well. Because *even though there was the idea of the diaries being private and no one had to read them except them and that they were just for their own use, they still wanted to spell the words correctly and have it so it had some form to it.* And they would have to come up and ask me to spell a lot of the words. *I couldn't write in my diary very much.* And then...we tried to set a special time aside every day and that just got to be

> almost impossible because of the way the schedule of the day goes... So from wanting to write everyday it went to three times a week and then *it sort of just died out after awhile because it was one of those activities that was real difficult to fit in.* Another problem with it was that the *children had a real difficult time reflecting back on what they had done...* Even if you gave them topics to write about, they wanted to write about what happened in their lives but *they didn't think their lives were very interesting...* Most of the kids at the end of the year weren't writing in diaries. (Interview, 9/8/80; Italics inserted by the authors)

It is notable that in making sense of the decline and fall of diary time Ms. Donovan cites factors that are related both to the private mental lives of her students and to the situational context of diary time. Her inferences that the children had difficulty reflecting and did not think their lives were very interesting derive from the student behaviors she observed. Diary time was plagued with both the concern on children's part that their spelling would be correct and the common lament by the children that they did not know what to write. This state of affairs seems paradoxical when the diary is considered as a private and personal written form. Yet when diary writing is examined in the classroom contest, it becomes apparent that the children's concerns make sense given the expectations about writing in general in school and the status of diary time as a part of the day's scheduled activities. Living with this paradox, student writers became stalled--and so did Ms. Donovan. It comes as no surprise, then, that diary time lost its priority in a daily schedule filled with a myriad of other instructional activities. A re-examination of some of the contextual features of diary time can help to explain its problems.

From the outset, diary time contained a number of conflicting messages regarding issues of privacy, correctness, and audience. Different students approached the task of diary keeping in different

ways that ultimately related to whether the diary functioned for them as private written reflection or as public sharing of thoughts in written form. Some of Ms. Donovan's efforts to communicate her plan for diary time and to support its undertaking contributed to the ambiguous nature of classroom diary writing. Ms. Donovan hints at these problems in the interview quoted above.

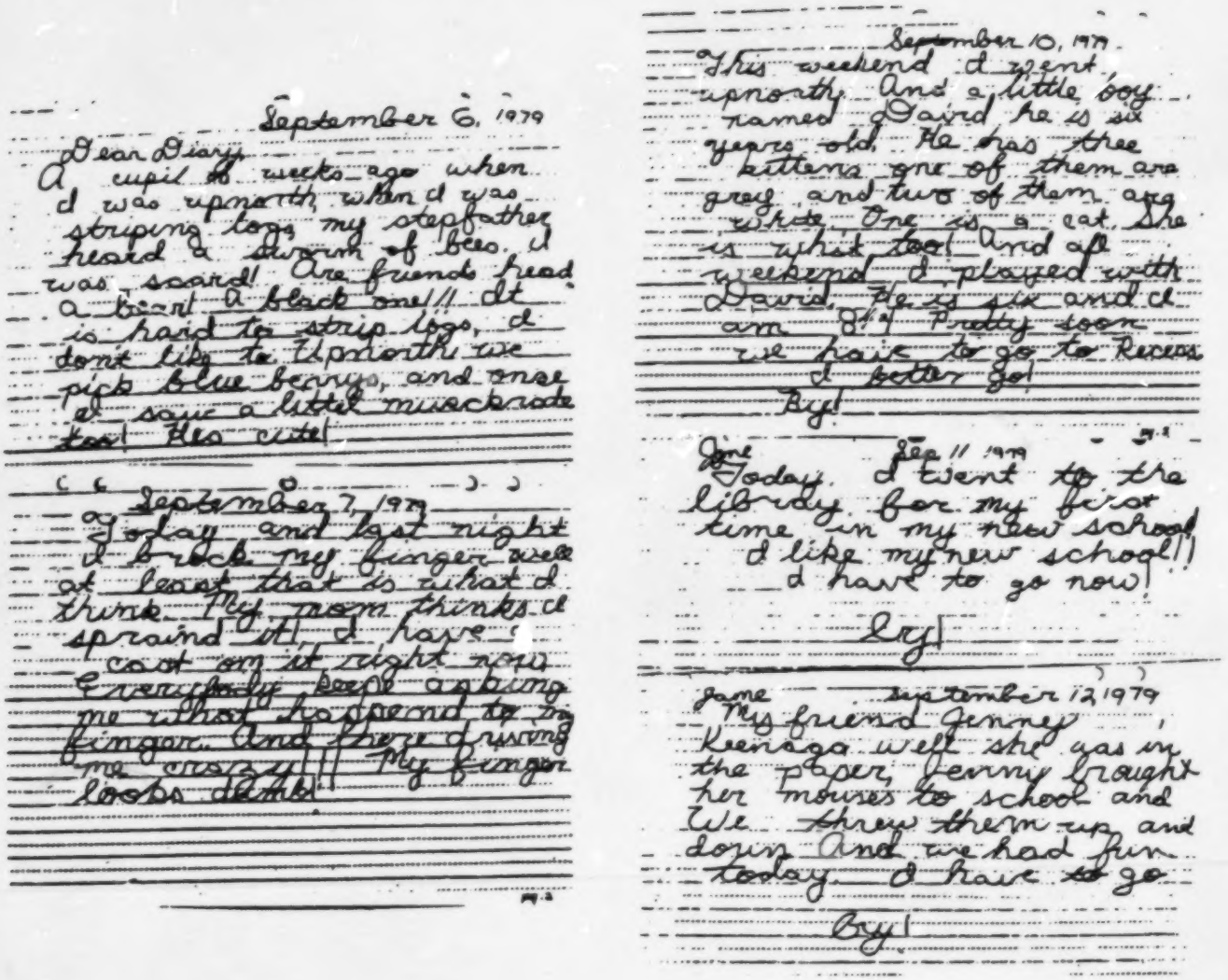
The Use of a Model

As noted in the description of diary time, Ms. Donovan attempted to provide models for the children in several ways. First, she made a model diary with decorated cover for the children. Second, she hoped to write in her own journal during diary time, thus modeling the process. And, third, she brought sample diary entries from published diaries to the class to share when children seemed to have difficulty getting started. Modeling provided both a prop and a standard, and in so doing, both enabled and limited the students' diary writing. A number of children, for example, copied Ms. Donovan's diary cover for their own. In addition, the sharing of published diary entries, while illustrative in their content and form, conveyed that diaries are not necessarily private and that there might be standards for what constitutes an appropriate diary entry despite Ms. Donovan's assertion that no one need read them. Finally, because of contextual constraints to be discussed below, Ms. Donovan was not afforded the privacy needed to write in her own journal during diary time. Thus an important part of the modeling process was unavailable to her and the students.

Audience and the Concern for Correctness

Much writing done in the course of a day in Room 12 was done as academic performance (Florio & Clark, in press). As such, that writing had Ms. Donovan as its primary audience and was evaluated by her. There are contextual features marking writing as academic performance in Room 12. They include the instigation of the writing by the teacher, the scheduling of the writing as part of the day's work, the collection of the writing, and the production of the writing on special paper different for the second graders than for the third graders. Diary time was to be a writing time that was private and personal. It was intended to stimulate student writing unconstrained by worries about correctness or audience. It was to be an opportunity to practice thinking on paper. Yet a second look at diary time shows that it had many of the situational trappings of writing as academic performance. First of all, diary time was initiated by the teacher and given regularly-scheduled status. Second, diaries were collected and kept in the teacher's locked file cabinet. While this move was intended to ensure privacy, it is worth noting that only tests, notebooks, and other official written materials were kept in that cabinet, and additionally that the children did not have access to their diaries unless Ms. Donovan unlocked the cabinet. Diaries were, as reported in the field notes, written on official school paper that varied by grade. Although not required, spelling correctness was reinforced by the adults in the room by the very fact that they were willing to interrupt their own writing to help students achieve correctness of surface features of their writing.

A sample from the first five diary entries of Jane, one of the third-grade students, provides evidence that many features of diary



September 6, 1979

Dear Diary

A cupil of weeks ago when I was upnorth, when I was striping logs my stepfather heard a swarm of bees. I was scard! Are friends head a bear a black one!! It is hard to strip logs, I dont like it. Upnorth we pick blue berrys, and once I saw a little muscrade too! Hes cute!

September 7, 1979

Today and last night I brok my finger well at least that is what I think. My mom thinks I sprain it. I have a cast on it right now. Everybody keeps asking me what happend to my finger. And there driving me crazy!! My finger looks dumb!

September 10, 1979

This weekend I went upnorth. And a little boy named Daird he is six years old. He has three kittens one of them are grey and two of them are white. One is a cat. She is what too! And all weekend I played with David. He is six and I am 8½. Pretty soon we have to go to Recess I better go!

Byg!

Sep 11 1979

Today. I went to the libridy for my first time in my new school I like my new school!! I have to go now!

Byg!

Sep 12 1979

My friend Jenney Keenaga well she was in the paper, Jenny brought her mouses to school and We threw them up and down. And we had fun today. I have to go

Byg!

Figure 1. Jane's diary.

time may have resembled formal academic writing rather than private written reflection (see Figure 1). Jane was a prolific writer who eventually offered to share her diary with the fieldworker. At first, Jane wrote at some length about things that had happened to her outside school and classroom. She experimented with audience by initially personifying the diary and addressing it directly (Dear Diary). Her second entry had no such direct address, but her third again resembles the "letter to diary" format by containing a closing (I better go! By!). It is interesting to note, however, that by the fourth day of school, while keeping the closing, Jane begins her entry as the students are requested to begin all their written work in Ms. Donovan's room--with her name just opposite the date.

Another notable change in Jane's diary entries occurs on the fourth day of school. Many children had been having difficulty deciding what to write on the first few days of school. In general, Ms. Donovan's suggestions limited the scope of the writing to what was happening in school, as was reported in the field notes (What you liked about today, what you didn't like about today, how you felt). While this strategy was intended for children not writing as fluently as Jane (and, presumably offered to ease the burden of recall), it is worthy of conjecture that Jane had begun to learn by day four that school-related topics were the most appropriate for classroom diaries. Her entries change in their subject matter and length after the first three days and become decidedly more school-related.

In a paradoxical way, the more support provided by Ms. Donovan in the form of models, protected time for diary writing, ensured safekeeping of the diaries, and help with spelling, the farther from the original

intent of diary writing the class moved. Faced with ambiguity about purpose, audience, and format, the students increased their pursuit of help from the teacher, the teacher continued to support the task, and a cycle began that moved most children far from diary writing by the end of the first month of school.

Diary time illuminates complexity of two sorts. It portrays the complexity of the writing process, where privacy and audience stand in a figure/ground relationship that shifts depending on the writer's intentions and the conventions of a particular genre. In addition, diary time illuminates the complexity of the classroom as an environment for writing. In diary time, there are social norms embedded in classroom life that govern the functions of writing there. Those norms give meaning both to the material environment (lined paper, filing cabinets, daily schedules) and the social relations that constitute everyday school life. It was difficult for the teacher and students to re-cast their usual ways of behaving and making sense of writing in school in the service of the innovations of diary time.

All of the complexities mentioned above contributed to the difficulties experienced in the attempt to stimulate writing in Ms. Donovan's room by means of diary time. A great deal can be learned by reflecting upon those difficulties. Most obviously, social context is profoundly involved in the writing process as students seek to discover the purpose, audience, and consequences of their writing. Many facets of the classroom environment contribute to the sense that students will make of a writing task and to their subsequent writing. Implements, materials, time, and space are all powerful parts of school writing activity. In addition, the teacher may be variously defined as initiator, helper,

critic, or audience for school writing. The way that her/his role is defined has implications for the student's social identity as well. Redefinitions of the roles of teacher and student in the writing process--no matter how subtle or bold--require attention and negotiation. In the end, because of such interactive complexity, not every innovation will look precisely like the one the teacher envisioned in planning, and not every one will capture the imagination and energy of every student. But all attempts at improvement of writing instruction will bear fruit if, when examined in retrospect, they can be seen to inform the continuing processes of setting realistic goals, planning meaningful activities, and structuring the learning environment to enhance the acquisition of written literacy.

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